



# NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

## Family Planning Program

### INFORMATION FOR NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING/ FERTILITY AWARENESS

This method is 75 percent to 98 percent effective when used correctly and consistently.

#### **BENEFITS:**

- \* Increased knowledge of reproductive cycle
- \* No menstrual changes
- \* Couples can work together
- \* May achieve pregnancy if used in reverse

#### **RISKS/SIDE EFFECTS:**

- \* No serious side effects
- \* Difficult to use with irregular cycles
- \* Less reliable if ill, breastfeeding or stressed
- \* Less reliable with certain medications
- \* Requires abstinence at certain times
- \* Requires discipline and commitment

**ALTERNATIVES:** You have received written information about the other methods of birth control that are available. For situations of suspected contraceptive failure, emergency contraception is available and offers a second chance to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** You have received information about natural family planning/fertility awareness and how to use it. This method does not protect against STDs (sexually transmitted disease) or HIV.

**DECISION NOT TO USE:** You may stop using natural family planning/fertility awareness at any time. A woman is most likely to become pregnant if she or her partner are not using a method of birth control.

**QUESTIONS:** You may ask questions about this method at any time and may contact the clinic with further questions.

## **Instructions for using Natural Family Planning**

This method uses techniques to determine high-risk fertile days in a woman's menstrual cycle. A woman's fertile time may begin three to five days before ovulation (because sperm can live in cervical mucus for three to five days). The fertile phase ends 24 hours after ovulation.

Some techniques used to determine fertile days include:

- ✓ **Calendar Method**: Records the length of menstrual cycles for several months. Ovulation is estimated to occur 14 days before the next menstrual period is expected to begin. High-risk fertile days are determined by reviewing menstrual cycle lengths. This method is more reliable in women who have regular and predictable menstrual cycles.
- ✓ **Cervical Mucus Method**: A woman checks the amount and type of mucus at the vaginal opening with her fingers or tissue paper and charts daily.
  - \* Post-menstrual mucus: scant or undetectable
  - \* Pre-ovulation mucus: cloudy, yellow or white, sticky
  - \* Ovulation mucus: clear, wet, stretches, slippery
  - \* Post-ovulation fertile mucus: thick, cloudy and sticky
  - \* Post-ovulation/post-fertile mucus: scant or undetectable
- ✓ **Basal Body Temperature Method**: Early morning temperature is measured before getting out of bed. A noticeable rise in temperature occurs with ovulation. Temperature readings are recorded on a chart to observe patterns throughout several menstrual cycles. A special digital basal thermometer is required.

Initiating any or all of the above methods may require further training. Several months of charts are needed to assist you and your health-care provider in identifying your patterns of fertile days.

- ✓ **Standard Days Method** is a more recent method that does not require formal instruction. This method is recommended for women who have cycle lengths of 26 to 32 days. Cycle beads, a tool that helps a woman track her menstrual cycle, are used to determine low- and high-risk days in the cycle. Cycle beads rely on the average fertile day patterns of most women rather than individual patterns that can require more abstaining days.

Abstaining or using other forms of contraception is required during fertile time frames determined after analyzing several months of charts.

Emergency contraception is available if unprotected sex occurs during unsafe times.